

# The Statesman and Commander: Civil-Military Dialogue in the Korean War

A Monograph

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## **Abstract**

The Statesman and Commander: Civil-Military Dialogue in the Korean War, by MAJ Andrew L. Smith, United States Army, 49 pages.

Carl von Clausewitz contemplates the civil-military relationship when he states, “The first supreme, the most far reaching act of judgement that the statesman and commander have to make is to establish by that test the kind of war on which they are embarking; neither mistaking it for, nor trying to turn it into, something that is alien to its nature.” This monograph explores civil-military relations and their relevance to theater strategy and operational art within the context of the Korean War. The purpose is to gain an understanding of how two extremely experienced and talented officers arrived at fundamentally different understandings of the Korean War. Specifically, the case studies examine Generals Douglas MacArthur and Matthew Ridgway in their service as the Commander in Chief of the United Nations Command.

Ultimately, the examination of civil-military relations led to the conclusion that Ridgway was more successful because his proximity to President Truman and the Joint Chiefs of Staff enabled a better understanding of the war’s limited nature. His comprehensive understanding of the strategic context and therefore, the purpose of armed intervention to include the logic behind Truman’s thinking, made evident the restrictions placed on military force. Furthermore, Ridgway was able to marry his strategic and political understanding with his knowledge of the operational environment. Combined, this understanding manifested itself in an attritional, defensive-offensive strategy that served to erode the enemy’s will. The aim of which, was a negotiated peace from a position of advantage.

On the other hand, the evidence suggests that MacArthur was simply unable to reconcile the difference between the final victories attained in the World Wars with the type of victory required to achieve political success in Korea. In this case, the examination of civil-military relations led to the conclusion that MacArthur’s physical separation from President Truman and the Joint Chiefs of Staff greatly inhibited a larger view of the war and therefore, the logic behind its limited aims. Even after Truman’s visit to Wake Island, MacArthur concluded that there was no policy or plan. Therefore, he set out to do what he thought was best for the national interest given his understanding of the war and victory. Similar to World War II, he sought final victory in what he believed to be a war against communism and its war-making capacity. His approach centered on imposing the terms of peace by isolating and overwhelming the enemy. In all, MacArthur’s offensive strategy of annihilation was fundamentally incompatible with the political aims and the means provided.

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## **Acronyms**

CINCUNC	Commander In Chief United Nations Command
FM	Field Manual
FSR	Field Service Regulation
JCS	Joint Chiefs of Staff
NSC	National Security Council
ROK	Republic of Korea
UN	United Nations

## Introduction

The first supreme, the most far reaching act of judgement that the statesman and commander have to make is to establish by that test the kind of war on which they are embarking; neither mistaking it for, nor trying to turn it into, something that is alien to its nature.

—Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*

In making the decision to employ armed force, Clausewitz makes explicit the importance of understanding the war embarked upon. This understanding begins by assessing the environment in its entirety. The “test” which Clausewitz mentions above refers to the analysis jointly conducted by the statesman and the commander. This analysis reveals the nature of the state and the motives that give rise to its objectives. The relationship between the friendly and enemy objectives determines the value of the object and therefore, the effort expended in its pursuit, both in magnitude and duration of sacrifice. Clausewitz further counsels that once the expenditure of effort exceeds the value of the political object, it must be renounced and peace must follow.<sup>1</sup> Therefore, the statesman and the commander must be clear on what they intend to achieve by war and how they intend to conduct the war.<sup>2</sup>

However, when combining chance and friction with the nature and complexity of limited war, it becomes increasingly difficult to convert the political aims into military objectives. An issue arises when the object of war is forced from its natural tendency towards something alien to its nature. Often, this results in a military objective ill-suited for the war at hand. Misconceived objectives increase the likelihood of unanticipated effects such as third party intervention and protracted conflict, both requiring an unforeseen commitment of resources. As the war drags on and with it time and effort, the ability to sustain the conflict becomes increasingly difficult.

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<sup>1</sup> Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, ed. and trans. Michael Howard, Peter Paret, and Bernard Brodie (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984), 92.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 579.

Regrettably, in some cases, a state is forced to prematurely withdraw from conflict without obtaining its initial objectives or doing so only in part.

The research for this monograph began with one broad question while reflecting on the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq; has the United States failed Clausewitz's dictum by not understanding the war embarked upon? Further provoking this interest was the National Defense University's recent publication, *Lessons Encountered: Learning from the Long War*. Providing a critical analysis from a strategic perspective, the study repeatedly mentions the inability of senior leaders to identify the problem or understand the environment. One example includes Secretary Robert Gates as he stated, "...our prospects in both countries were grimmer than perceived, our initial objectives were unrealistic... [and] our knowledge and our intelligence were woefully inadequate. We entered both countries oblivious to how little we knew."<sup>3</sup> Worse, the study identified that after fifteen years of war senior leaders remained unable to identify what or who the enemy is.<sup>4</sup> In short the study concluded that, "Neither national-level leaders nor field commanders fully understood the operational environment."<sup>5</sup>

With this in mind, *Lessons Encountered* attributes much of the problem to a dysfunction in civil-military relations while discussing the various interpretations of "best military advice." Specific to Iraq, the study argues that the military had little voice or influence in the decisions

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<sup>3</sup> Christopher J. Lamb and Megan Franco, "National-Level Coordination and Implementation: How System Attributes Trumped Leadership," in *Lessons Encountered: Learning from the Long War*, ed. Richard Hooker and Joseph Collins (Washington, DC: National Defense University Press, 2015), 222.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 241-242.

<sup>5</sup> Richard D. Hooker and Joseph J. Collins, *Lesson Encountered: Learning from the Long War*, ed. Richard Hooker and Joseph Collins (Washington, DC: National Defense University Press, 2015), 11.



surrounding the invasion.<sup>6</sup> Later, when considering the decision to Surge in 2007, the recommendations made by senior military leaders appeared to be grounded in “their particular backgrounds, sets of experiences, and personal perspectives, none of which mirrored the President’s.”<sup>7</sup> Concerning Afghanistan, by 2009 there was a perception within the White House that the military had failed to provide feasible options and had attempted to influence political decision-making by using the media to circumvent the policy process.<sup>8</sup> Accordingly, the focus now turns to a brief discussion of civil-military relations given the gravity of any decision to go to war and with it, the need to achieve a sustainable political outcome.

### **Civil Military Relations**

In general, civil-military relations describe the interactions among the people, institutions and military of a state.<sup>9</sup> However, the topic is more complex than it appears and has resulted in long standing debates and a great deal of corresponding literature. In western society, the primary points of contention center on the degree of political influence in war, the military’s involvement in policy formulation as well as its ability to influence the allocation of resources, and the appropriate level of military influence on society.

According to Clausewitz, “subordinating the political point of view to the military would be absurd, for it is policy that created war. Policy is the guiding intelligence and war only the

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<sup>6</sup> Richard D. Hooker and Joseph J. Collins, “Reflections and Lessons Encountered,” in *Lessons Encountered: Learning from the Long War*, ed. Richard Hooker and Joseph Collins (Washington, DC: National Defense University Press, 2015), 407.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 409.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 412.

<sup>9</sup> Mackubin T. Owens, “What Military Officers Need To Know About Civil-Military Relations,” *Naval War College Review* 65, no. 2 (Spring 2012): 1.

instrument, not vice versa.”<sup>10</sup> In 1957 following the Korea War, Samuel Huntington expanded upon the concept of civil-military relations with *The Soldier and the State*. He argued that “the area of military science is subordinate to, and *yet independent of* [emphasis added], the area of politics. Just as war serves the ends of politics, the military profession serves the ends of the state.”<sup>11</sup> Moreover, he argued that politics are beyond the scope of military competence and as such, a clear line of demarcation exists between the role of the statesman and that of the commander. In this view, the commander is responsible for managing violence while the statesman maintained “objective control.” The overall idea is that the civilian leadership establishes the objectives leaving the military professionals to plan and execute the mission, thus minimizing the degree of political influence on military matters. This view of civil-military relations remained the dominant view in the wake of Vietnam and continued well into the 1990s.

Nonetheless, Clausewitz goes on to assert that it is not sensible to summon a soldier and ask him for “purely, military advice” as policy is not a tyrant and therefore, it must be informed.<sup>12</sup> Indeed, there is no clear divide between the roles and responsibilities of military and civilian leadership. A more recent view that emerged in 2002 is that of Eliot Cohen. He argues for an “unequal dialogue” where the civilian and military leaders engage in discourse, expressing their views candidly. However, the authority and final decision rest with the statesman for the statesmen is ultimately responsible for the policy expressed.<sup>13</sup> The point here is that discourse occurs between the statesmen and the commander as opposed to the one-way conversation

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<sup>10</sup> Clausewitz, *On War*, 607.

<sup>11</sup> Samuel P. Huntington, *The Soldier and the State: The Theory and Politics of Civil-Military Relations* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1957), 71.

<sup>12</sup> Clausewitz, *On War*, 607.

<sup>13</sup> Eliot A. Cohen, *Supreme Command: Soldiers, Statesmen, and Leadership in Wartime* (New York, NY: The Free Press, 2002), 214.

described by Huntington. Likewise, Dale Herspring disagrees with a clear line of demarcation for there are no such things as purely civilian or military issues when it comes to matters of national security. He asserts that “expecting the military to remain solely on the implementation side of the process makes no more sense than expecting civilians to remain solely on the formulation side of the process.”<sup>14</sup> He further argues that the point of friction between military and civilian leaders is a result of service culture and the understanding, or lack thereof, by civilian leaders.

Aside from where one stands on the debate, the organization of the Department of Defense also plays a significant role. To cope with the current environment, President Truman required a more efficient and manageable policy-making apparatus, resulting in the 1947 National Security Act. The act significantly restructured the relations between the civilian and military leadership. In addition to creating the National Security Council (NSC) and Central Intelligence Agency, it sought to unify the various War Departments. Simultaneously, the act created the Department of the Air Force while merging the three War Departments under the guide of the Secretary of Defense. In 1949, the act was amended to give the Secretary of Defense more power over the individual services and their secretaries.<sup>15</sup> It is important to note that unlike today, field commanders such as MacArthur and Ridgway, reported to and received direction from the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, in this case General Omar Bradley. This created an additional filter through which guidance and direction flowed from the President. Moreover, this design ensured that the Commander in Chief United Nations Command (CINCUNC) had no

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<sup>14</sup> Dale R. Herspring, *The Pentagon and the Presidency: Civil-Military Relations from FDR to George W. Bush* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2005), 20.

<sup>15</sup> The National Security Act of 1947, Public Law 253, 80<sup>th</sup> Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> sess. (July 26, 1947), 1-10, accessed March 27, 2016, <http://global.oup.com/us/companion.websites/9780195385168/resources/chapter10/nsa/nsa.pdf>.

direct connection whatsoever with the United Nations (UN).<sup>16</sup> In all, the Secretary of Defense provided the interface between the civilian leadership and Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS).

Coming full circle, the most far-reaching act of judgement that the statesman and commander have to make is to understand the purpose of the war and how to conduct it. The research indicated that Ridgway not only fought a fundamentally different war from MacArthur but also that he was more successful by doing so. Accordingly, the research question became “Why was Ridgway more successful than MacArthur as the Commander in Chief of United Nations Command?” In gaining an appreciation for each commander’s understanding of the war and his role within it, the distinction between the two became more and more apparent. Ultimately, the examination of civil-military relations, led to the conclusion that Ridgway was more successful because his proximity to President Truman and the JCS enabled a better understanding of the war’s limited nature. His comprehensive understanding of the strategic context and therefore, the purpose of armed intervention to include the logic behind Truman’s thinking, made evident the restrictions placed on military force. Furthermore, Ridgway was able to marry his strategic and political understanding with his knowledge of the operational environment. Combined, this understanding manifested itself in an attritional, defensive-offensive strategy that served to erode the enemy’s will. The aim of which, was a negotiated peace from position of advantage.

The focus now turns to an overview of the strategic context leading up to the US intervention in Korea. Following is the analysis of two separate case studies: MacArthur’s war from June 1950 to April 1951, and Ridgway’s war from December 1950 to May 1952. Each case study will begin with a brief biographical overview followed by an examination of the

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<sup>16</sup> Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, *The Joint Chiefs of Staff and National Policy 1950-1951: The Korean War Part I*, vol. III, *History of the Joint Chiefs of Staff*, by James F. Schnabel and Robert J. Watson (Washington, DC: Office of Joint History, 1998), 59.

commander's understanding and the implications of that understanding in fighting the war. The analysis considers how each commander's understanding was shaped from experience, discourse with civilian leaders, and events on the ground. Prior experience illuminates the commander's preconceived notions and tendencies while the events on the ground serve as both a manifestation of the commander's understanding and his demonstrated ability, or lack thereof, to adapt to something new and unexpected. On the other hand, the civil-military discourse aimed to mediate between the two, given its larger view, in hope of creating shared understanding.

### **Strategic Context**

Linking tactical action to strategic objectives becomes inherently more difficult in limited war. In these cases, the political object may not provide a suitable military object as it would in the conquest of a province or the overthrow of a government. Rather, the military object must be one "...that will serve the political purpose and symbolize it in the peace negotiations."<sup>17</sup> Limited war requires the commander to operate in a constrained environment where limited means and political requirements tend to dominate tactical action. Such was the case in the Korean War and continues today.

US-Soviet agreements in 1945 ultimately set the conditions for war on the Korean peninsula. During the Yalta Conference in February, President Roosevelt sought to end the war in the Pacific theater by gaining Soviet assistance in fighting the Japanese. In return, the Soviet Union gained territory, primarily in Manchuria, which served to extend their influence in the Asia-Pacific region. Following the surrender of Japan in August and the subsequent division of Korea at the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel, the stage was set for war given dual US-Soviet occupation of the

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<sup>17</sup> Clausewitz, *On War*, 81.

peninsula.<sup>18</sup> As early as October of 1945, the Soviet Union began to shift its policy towards creating a communist buffer state through the reunification of Korea.<sup>19</sup> Simultaneously, Korean society began to grow apart given communist influence in the north and democratic influence in the south. Meanwhile, North Korea's leader Kim Il-Sung, received significant military support from the Soviet Union while South Korea's Syngman Rhee received only enough for self-defense. Tensions continued to increase with Rhee's election to President in July 1948 and the UN's recognition of the thirty-eighth parallel as an international boundary. With both leaders passionately determined to reunify the peninsula, border disputes continued between 1948 and 1950, killing approximately one-hundred thousand Koreans.<sup>20</sup>

Simultaneously, there was a fundamental shift in US foreign policy. The "Truman doctrine," established in 1947, committed the United States to providing "political, military, and economic assistance to all democratic nations under threat from external or internal authoritarian forces."<sup>21</sup> Effectively, this policy reoriented the United States towards intervening in conflicts that involved other than vital national interests. The same year, NSC-49 called for a policy of containment given Russia's perpetual war with capitalism and demonstrated proclivity to use military force.<sup>22</sup> These adjustments to policy in 1947 guaranteed US intervention in the event of

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<sup>18</sup> US Department of State, "The Yalta Conference, 1945," Office of the Historian, Bureau of Public Affairs, accessed October 11, 2015, <https://history.state.gov/milestones/1937-1945/yalta-conf>.

<sup>19</sup> Allan R. Millett, *The War For Korea, 1950-1951: They Came From the North* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2010), 11.

<sup>20</sup> George C. Herring, *From Colony to Superpower: U.S. Foreign Relations since 1776* (Oxford, NY: Oxford University Press, 2008), 639.

<sup>21</sup> US Department of State, "The Truman Doctrine, 1947," Office of the Historian, Bureau of Public Affairs, accessed October 11, 2015, <https://history.state.gov/milestones/1945-1952/truman-doctrine>.

<sup>22</sup> US Department of State, "Kennan and Containment, 1947," Office of the Historian, Bureau of Public Affairs, accessed October 11, 2015, [8](https://history.state.gov/milestones/1945-</a></p></div><div data-bbox=)

overt aggression by the Soviet-backed North Koreans.

Additionally, 1949 was a year of many critical events on the strategic setting. In March, NSC 8/1, “The Position of the United States with Respect to Korea,” called for unifying the peninsula under democratic rule by political and diplomatic means. Shortly following was NSC 8/2 that warned of the Soviet’s intention to dominate all of Korea.<sup>23</sup> In April, the United States joined NATO and furthered its commitment to collective security. However, despite the warnings of Soviet-backed aggression in Korea, the United States intended to remove its military forces from the peninsula by June 30 as Congress pressed for reductions in aid to South Korea. From a military standpoint, the logic behind this decision centered on the assumption that aggression would continue whether or not US troops were present.<sup>24</sup> Furthermore, the JCS believed that air and sea power along with material support could repel a North Korean attack. Meanwhile, Truman was concerned about becoming involved in a war that the Nation could not afford in an area of marginal significance.<sup>25</sup> Complicating matters, Russia became nuclear capable in August and China was lost to the Communists with the establishment of the People’s Republic of China in October. By the end of 1949, the strategic setting invoked fears that all of Asia would be lost to Russian colonialism and therefore, communism.<sup>26</sup>

Consequently, the New Year began with a reassessment of strategic priorities and global

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1952/kennan.

<sup>23</sup> US National Security Council, “NSC 8/2: A Report to the President on The Position of the United States with Respect to Korea,” Washington DC, March 22, 1949, 10-11, accessed November 26, 2015, [http://www.trumanlibrary.org/whistlestop/study\\_collections/korea/large/documents/pdfs/kr-7-8.pdf](http://www.trumanlibrary.org/whistlestop/study_collections/korea/large/documents/pdfs/kr-7-8.pdf).

<sup>24</sup> Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, *The Joint Chiefs of Staff and National Policy 1950-1951*, 11-12.

<sup>25</sup> Herring, *From Colony to Superpower*, 640.

<sup>26</sup> Millett, *The War For Korea*, 64.

posturing. Japan remained a focal point given the United States responsibility for its defense while simultaneously overseeing its reconstruction. It also provided strategic basing for the defense of the Pacific-Rim. Concerning Korea however, Secretary of State Dean Acheson failed to explicitly mention South Korea in his speech to National Press Club on January 12, 1950. This combined with the withdrawal of US troops from South Korea essentially gave North Korea the 'green light' to attack, completely surprising America.

At the onset of hostilities the strategic problem was "...how to conduct a war of limited goals without conducting a war of unacceptable attrition."<sup>27</sup> This meant that the Army of World War II, seeking annihilation in pursuit of final victory, would now have to cope with politics limiting the use of force. Additionally, a limited objective requires the military to coerce the enemy and obtain his compliance. Understanding this, NSC-68 also outlined Truman's policy of "calculated and gradual coercion."<sup>28</sup> The intent was to incrementally raise the costs of non-compliance above the enemy's threshold instead of seeking his outright destruction. Therefore, the terms of peace would be negotiated rather than dictated, which required a fundamentally different approach from the two World Wars.

Within five days of the North Korean attack, the Department of the Army requested an estimate from General MacArthur, who at the time was designated the Commander of Far Eastern Command. On June 30 1950, MacArthur reported, "there is no evidence to substantiate a belief that the North Koreans are engaged in a limited objective offensive or in a raid." He based his assessment on the number of forces employed, the depth of the attack, and the landings made

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<sup>27</sup> Millett, *The War For Korea*, 398.

<sup>28</sup> US Executive Secretary, "NSC-68: A Report to the National Security Council: on the Position of the United States with Respect To Korea," Washington, DC, April 14, 1950, 21-22, accessed October 11, 2015, [https://www.trumanlibrary.org/whistlestop/study\\_collections/coldwar/documents/pdf/10-1.pdf](https://www.trumanlibrary.org/whistlestop/study_collections/coldwar/documents/pdf/10-1.pdf).



south of the thirty-eighth parallel along the east coast. This correctly indicated to MacArthur that the North Koreans were “engaged in an all-out offensive to subjugate South Korea.”<sup>29</sup> However, President Truman made it clear that he wanted to avoid any action that could result in World War III for he declared in August, “We are not at war” and referred to the situation in Korea as a “police action” requiring the support of “other free nations in the cause of common defense.”<sup>30</sup> Somewhat surprisingly, he made this statement in light of the fact that the Gallop poll reported eighty percent of Americans supporting a heavy hand in the war with seventy percent supporting tax increases to fund the war.<sup>31</sup>

In all, the administration’s primary concern was with avoiding direct conflict with Russia. According to 1946 estimates, Soviet forces could mobilize in four months’ time to reach some 12.4 million ground troops organized into 650 combat divisions.<sup>32</sup> Meanwhile, the United States had steadily reduced its defense budget since 1945 reaching a total strength of 574,000 soldiers organized into ten divisions by July of 1948.<sup>33</sup> This combined with the Soviets developing the atomic bomb in 1949 not only increased the threat to Europe but also the costs of engaging the

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<sup>29</sup> Douglas MacArthur, “Department of the Army Staff Communications Office, Teletype Conference,” June 30 1950, Harry S. Truman Papers, Naval Aide to the President Files, (Independence, MO: The Truman Library, 1950), Box 13.

<sup>30</sup> Harry S. Truman, “Department of the Army Staff Message Center, Outgoing Classified Message,” June 29 1950, Harry S. Truman Papers, Naval Aide to the President Files, (Independence, MO: The Truman Library, 1950), Box 13.

<sup>31</sup> George H. Gallup, “Strong Controls, Higher Taxes Favored by Public in Survey,” *Washington Post*, August 6, 1950, quoted in Steven Casey, *Selling the Korean War* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2002), 35-36.

<sup>32</sup> Brian M. Linn, *The Echo of Battle: The Army’s Way of War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), 153.

<sup>33</sup> US Army Forces Information, *The Army Almanac: A Book of Facts Concerning the Army of the United States* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1950), 625. Accessed December 30, 2015, <http://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=uc1.b4233664;view=1up;seq=9>.

Soviets in direct conflict.

However, the JCS concluded in August 1950, that it was not likely for the Soviets or Chinese to overtly support North Korea unless they were ready to precipitate global war.<sup>34</sup> This conclusion was based on the assumption that the Soviets controlled the actions of North Korea. Furthermore, the proxy war in Korea was a way for the Soviets to tie up US resources and divert attention away from Europe. Concerning Chinese intervention, it was logical to perceive the PRC as internally focused in an attempt to consolidate the gains from the revolution while placing continued effort towards pacifying the countryside and gaining control of Taiwan. Last, it was assumed that the Chinese would not intervene without the consent and support of Russia.

In any case, Truman made it clear that he did not want US intervention to expand the conflict beyond Korea's borders. The task therefore, was to coerce the North Koreans to withdraw without widening the war or diverting the military resources required for the defense of Europe. Therefore, the political objective was the restoration of Korea status quo ante bellum. With the objective clearly identified, Truman outlined the limited nature of the Korean War. He stated that the military must accomplish these objectives without further expanding the war. He also stated that the defense of Europe and Japan superseded that of Korea. Additionally, Truman would not allow the conflict to exhaust the strategic reserve nor deplete the resources required for defending Europe and deterring nuclear war. Last, he stated that the war in Korea could not ruin the economy.<sup>35</sup> Truman's logic was that the preservation of South Korea, although a limited objective, would prove to the communists that they could not win a regional war, thereby

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<sup>34</sup> Eliot A. Cohen and John Gooch, *Military Misfortunes: The Anatomy of Failure in War* (New York, NY: The Free Press, 1990), 194.

<sup>35</sup> Cohen, *Military Misfortunes*, 393.

deterring Soviet aggression in Europe and bolstering the credibility of forward collective defense under the UN.<sup>36</sup>

Conforming to the logic of calculated and gradual coercion, Truman quickly implemented several measures to demonstrate America's resolve in the name of collective security. While simultaneously garnering support through the UN, he ordered the Seventh Fleet to Taiwan, air and naval strikes south of the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel, and an Army advisory team to Seoul. Shortly thereafter, he authorized MacArthur to use the ground troops at his disposal, which consisted of four divisions and one regimental combat team located in Japan. These actions were based on the assumption that the North Koreans and Soviets believed the United States would not intervene. However, if the United States were to intervene the North Koreans would withdraw their forces north of the thirty-eighth parallel. In the event this assumption proved wrong, the military was in position to reestablish the status quo by force.

Militarily, the administration's actions not only made sense according to the policy of calculated and gradual coercion, but also made sense in accordance with the military doctrine of the time. Many doctrinal publications reference breaking the enemy's will through the destruction of his forces. However, the doctrine recognized the distinction between wars of annihilation to obtain final victory and those of exhaustion to obtain a negotiated settlement from a position of advantage. Remaining unchanged, the 1942 Field Service Regulations (FSR) 100-15, *Larger Units*, provided the military with an answer to the crisis in Korea that Ridgway would later adopt as the Eighth Army Commander and carry forward as the CINCUNC:

When the political objective of a nation at war is simply the denial of what is desired by the opponent and the preservation of the status quo, the integrity of its territory and institutions, that nation is on the *strategic defensive*. Its national objective may be secured by the repulse of the invader, by the exhaustion of his resources, and the breaking of his

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<sup>36</sup> Cohen, *Military Misfortunes*, 365.

will to continue the offensive.<sup>37</sup>

Conversely, the *strategic offensive*, better suited for gaining final victory, requires superior forces to quickly overwhelm, defeat, and impose its will on the enemy while retaining enough force to control hostile populations.<sup>38</sup>

In light of the distinction, FSR 100-15 provided an updated view of civil-military relations as it pertains to operational art. Strategy was no longer considered apart from politics. Rather, “the higher commander should be fully conversant with the political objectives so that his strategic plans of action may attain” those objectives.<sup>39</sup> Moreover, as stated in the 1949 version of Field Manual (FM) 100-5, *Operations*, the commander must ensure the proper expenditure of combat strength in proportion to the objective to be attained.<sup>40</sup> In short, the doctrine recognized the distinction between wars of annihilation and war of exhaustion. In either case, the military strategy must remain in accord with the political objective.<sup>41</sup>

Yet, evidence suggests that MacArthur was simply unable to reconcile the difference between the final victories attained in the World Wars with the type of victory required to achieve political success in Korea. In this case, the examination of civil-military relations led to the conclusion that MacArthur’s physical separation from the President and JCS greatly inhibited a larger view of the war and therefore, the logic behind its limited aims. Similar to World War II, he set out to isolate and overwhelm the enemy creating the conditions required to impose the

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<sup>37</sup> Field Service Regulations (FSR) 100-15, *Larger Units* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1942), 14.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> FSR 100-15, *Larger Units*, 13-14..

<sup>40</sup> Field Manual (FM) 100-5, *Operations* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1949), 28.

<sup>41</sup> Carl Hodge, “Delbruck, Hans: (1848-1929),” in *Philosophers of War: The Evolution of History’s Greatest Military Thinkers*, vol. 2. ed. Daniel Coetzee and Lee Eysturlid (Santa Barbra, CA: Praeger, 2013), 24.

terms of peace. The offensive strategy of annihilation was fundamentally incompatible with the political aims and the means provided. In this case, civil-military dialogue failed to create shared understanding.

Before turning to the case studies, it is important to highlight one more thing. The aim is not to repeat what many historical accounts have done in the past and that is to place the responsibility for success and failure squarely on the shoulders of the commander. Rather the aim is to try to understand how two extremely experienced and highly accomplished officers arrived at different interpretations of the war resulting in two fundamentally different approaches. Again, a major contributing factor to success and failure in war lies in the realm of civil-military relations as the statesman and commander jointly assess the war at hand in order to arrive at a shared understanding.

### **MacArthur's War, June 1950 – April 1951**

#### MacArthur's Background

To begin, *The History of the Joint Chiefs of Staff* provides a brief but detailed summary of MacArthur's military background as well as his status as an American hero, all of which have implications to the discussion of civil-military relations and the conduct of the Korea war.

Without question, MacArthur attained unparalleled prestige with the American people as well as great popularity within Congress. The son of a Civil War hero, he graduated West Point in 1903 at the top of his class. During World War I, he successfully served as a Division Chief of Staff and Brigade Commander earning him the rank of Brigadier General at the age of thirty-eight.

Following World War I, he served as the Superintendent of West Point and later as the Army Chief of Staff before retiring in 1937 with nearly twenty years of service as a general officer. He then became the military advisor to Government of the Philippines until 1941 where the threat of Japan brought him back into service. In 1944, he became General of the Army and by 1945, he

had personally accepted the surrender of Japan and spent the following years overseeing its reconstruction, earning him additional recognition as a diplomat.<sup>42</sup>

#### MacArthur's Understanding of the War

In order to gain an appreciation for MacArthur's understanding of the Korean War, it is necessary to highlight several key points discussed in turn below. First, MacArthur was physically separated from the United States for nearly fourteen years. In short, he was attuned to the Pacific theater, but lacked a global perspective. On two occasions in 1945, he declined invitations from Truman to return home and receive honors from a grateful nation. On both occasions, he replied that the situation in the Pacific required his full attention and therefore, he reluctantly could not attend. Truman later remarked in October of 1950, that he was concerned that MacArthur had been away from home for too long and "had lost some his contacts with the country and its people."<sup>43</sup> This statement is indicative of the misunderstanding that existed between MacArthur and the President. In fact, Secretary of Defense, George Marshall testified in the MacArthur hearings, that the "fundamental divergence" of thought:

arises from the inherent difference between the position of a field commander, whose mission is limited to a particular area and a particular antagonist, and the position of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the Secretary of Defense, and the President, who are responsible for the total security of the United States, and who, to achieve and maintain this security, must weigh our interests and objectives in one part of the globe with those in other areas of the world so as to attain the best over-all balance.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, *The Joint Chiefs of Staff and National Policy 1950-1951*, 243-244.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 113.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 254.

Indeed, MacArthur's entire world since 1937 had centered on the Pacific some seven-thousand miles away from the discussions of national security in the Pentagon. This lack of physical contact with America and its leadership greatly contributed to his myopic view of the war.

Second, MacArthur's definition of victory and how to achieve it was a product of the two World Wars. He envisioned a final victory with imposed terms of peace that could only be achieved by an unconditional surrender or the wholesale destruction of enemy forces. Returning to FSR 100-15, *Larger Units*, the "strategic offensive," requires superior forces to quickly overwhelm, defeat, and impose its will on the enemy."<sup>45</sup> Domination via the strategic offensive was MacArthur's theory of action for achieving final victory. This theory was proven in the First World War, as he witnessed the total collapse of Germany and again in World War II, with that of Japan. In similar fashion, MacArthur was convinced that Korea was a war of annihilation for he argued that the "use of force cannot be limited" as there is simply "no substitute for victory."<sup>46</sup> Understanding this, anything short of final victory was to accommodate and appease the communists who seemed determined to expand their influence in Asian.

It is quite plausible that MacArthur's definition of victory combined with his experience in World War II, largely formed his conceptual approach to the Korean War. Air and sea power not only facilitated bold amphibious landings, but also served to isolate the Japanese held islands, making the enemy's destruction inevitable. Similarly, the aim of the Inchon landing in conjunction with the Pusan breakout and air strikes north of the thirty-eighth parallel was to isolate the North Koreans by destroying their bases and cutting their lines of communication.<sup>47</sup> This bold maneuver was in keeping with the strategic offensive for once the enemy was on his

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<sup>45</sup> FSR 100-15, *Larger Units*, 14.

<sup>46</sup> Millett, *The War For Korea*, 420, 436.

<sup>47</sup> Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, *The Joint Chiefs of Staff and National Policy 1950-1951*, 84-86.

heels, the pursuit to the Yalu River would ensure the capitulation of North Korea. MacArthur's September 7 message to the JCS stated that the landing at Inchon would isolate the enemy and provide the opportunity for a decisive blow. He went on to argue that doing anything other would commit the US "to a war of indefinite duration, of gradual attrition and of doubtful results," as the enemy could reinforce and sustain the overall fight at a much greater level than UN forces.<sup>48</sup> Even in the face of Chinese intervention, discussed in detail below, MacArthur sought to continue the offensive by isolating the peninsula with air and sea power. Later, he argued for an expanded war effort in order to break the stalemate that began to set in by the end of March of 1951.

Additionally, the surprise of North Korea's attack not only confirmed fears of communist expansion but also meant that MacArthur, unlike Ridgway, did not have the luxury of time. No contingency plan existed for Korea and therefore, MacArthur leaned heavily on his experience to prevent all of Korea from being lost to communism. The unprovoked attack combined with the recent establishment of the PRC was in itself reason enough to confirm communist aggression and its desire for imperialistic expansion. This supported MacArthur's idea of fighting and defeating communism everywhere it existed. While July was spent attempting to repel the attack and mobilize ground troops, August was spent hanging on for survival. Meanwhile, MacArthur and the JCS were trying to figure out how to establish an international army and its command structure while simultaneously coping with the effects of the demobilization and budget cuts that followed World War II.<sup>49</sup> In September, with their backs against the water's edge, MacArthur assumed the offensive and did so boldly where his success further validated the supremacy of the offense.

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<sup>48</sup> Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, *The Joint Chiefs of Staff and National Policy 1950-1951*, 89-90.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 53.



Third, MacArthur's conception of warfare and victory was accompanied by an antiquated view of civil-military relations, one that was not conducive to limited war. Once the objective was set by the statesmen, MacArthur was to be left alone to achieve it while receiving the full support of the Nation. Doctrinally, until 1942, this was the understanding and the two World Wars did little to prove otherwise. The Command and General Staff College's 1936 publication, *The Principles of Strategy*, states, "Politics and strategy are radically and fundamentally things apart. Strategy begins where politics end. All that soldiers ask is that once the policy is settled, strategy and command shall be regarded as being in a sphere apart from politics." The section goes on to refer to politicians as "laymen" in military matters and discusses the negative effects of their "meddling" in the conduct of operations, as well as their impatience and fickleness in changing the plan or its objectives in stride. Additionally, the manual discusses the tendency of politicians, given "non-military considerations," to withdraw men and supplies that "can or should be made available" to war.<sup>50</sup> Not surprisingly, politicians withholding men and resources while placing operational restrictions on the commander came to be a central point of friction between MacArthur and Washington. Indeed, he publically attributed the impending stalemate of 1951 to "abnormal military inhibitions."<sup>51</sup>

Intimately related was MacArthur's belief that the war should have been supported by all available means. Examples include the disagreements over basing resources in Taiwan, enlisting the support of Chiang Kai-Shek's troops, strategic bombing in Manchuria, and establishing a

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<sup>50</sup> Command and General Staff School, *Principles of Strategy for an Independent Corps or Army in a Theater of Operations* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: The Command and General Staff School Press, 1936), 19-20.

<sup>51</sup> Douglas MacArthur, "General Douglas MacArthur Chronology," March 7, 1951, Harry S. Truman Papers, Files of David D. Lloyd, Administrative Assistant to the President (Independence, MO: The Truman Library, 1950), Box 17.

naval blockade off China's coast. From a strictly military point of view, these actions made complete sense. Taiwan was an "unsinkable aircraft carrier and submarine tender."<sup>52</sup> The Republic of Korea (ROK) Army, suffering a disastrous defeat, needed all the help it could get and Chiang Kai-Shek was more than willing to provide assistance. Moreover, by not blockading the coast and bombing the bases in Manchuria as well as the bridges over the Yalu River, the enemy could sustain the fight from a "privileged sanctuary."<sup>53</sup> However, all of this served to provoke the Chinese and risk widening the war, which remained of primary concern to the administration throughout the war.

Additionally, MacArthur continuously requested more troops; the same troops that were dedicated to the defense of Europe or those identified as the strategic reserve. Instances of this dispute occurred at the Pusan perimeter, following the Chinese intervention, and again at the initial signs of stalemate. In July and August of 1950, MacArthur made clear his intention of destroying the North Koreans, as opposed to merely repulsing them. This combined with North Korea's all-out effort at unification allowed for an increase in MacArthur's force allocation. By August, he controlled eight of the Army's ten divisions, leaving only one for the defense of Europe and the other as the strategic reserve.<sup>54</sup> Meanwhile, Army Chief of Staff, General Lawton Collins continued working with the JCS and Secretary of Defense to manage the competing priorities while overseeing the mobilization of the reserves. In doing so, Collins urged MacArthur to "adapt his strategy to the forces already made available."<sup>55</sup> Nonetheless, as the war carried on, MacArthur continued to request more troops and less operational restrictions while the JCS

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<sup>52</sup> Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, *The Joint Chiefs of Staff and National Policy 1950-1951*, 18.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 204.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 77-79.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 82.

balanced the military's global priorities and attempted limit what appeared to be an ever-expanding war.

On every occasion, MacArthur's requests for additional forces were accompanied by "either-or" options; either the United States commits to victory and the destruction of the enemy or it accepts stalemate and withdraws from the peninsula. A clear example of MacArthur's dichotomy between victory and stalemate is evidenced in a string of messages that occurred from December 29, 1950 to January 10, 1951. In short, the JCS ordered MacArthur to assume the defensive, preserve his forces, and erode the political prestige of China. Additionally, he was directed as a matter of contingency only, to provide an estimate outlining the conditions surrounding a withdrawal from the peninsula.<sup>56</sup> In reply, MacArthur not only found these directives to be contradictory but more importantly, he requested either a change in policy or withdrawal from Korea. While admitting the importance of Europe, he did not see the logic in defending it by "accepting defeat everywhere else"<sup>57</sup> He reasoned that with more force he could neutralize China's capability to wage aggressive war. Accordingly, on December 30 he requested a clear decision to fight or withdraw given what appeared to be Washington's "loss of will to win in Korea."<sup>58</sup> He further stated that if the restrictions on the use of force remained in place, "the command should be withdrawn from the peninsula just as rapidly as it is tactically possible to do so."<sup>59</sup>

In all, the disagreements regarding the overall commitment of effort further demonstrate the divergence between Washington and MacArthur's Tokyo headquarters. Given his

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<sup>56</sup> Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, *The Joint Chiefs of Staff and National Policy 1950-1951*, 179-180.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 182.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 181.

<sup>59</sup> Ridgway, *The War for Korea*, 150.

understanding of victory and warfare, MacArthur was unable to comprehend why, in a time of war, that all available resources were not mobilized and applied towards ensuring the enemy's destruction. On the other hand, Truman sought only the preservation of South Korea, as it would deny the communist a regional victory, thereby deterring Soviet aggression in Europe and bolstering the credibility of the UN. Unfortunately, this divergence led to the many public statements MacArthur made in contradiction to the administration. In large part, these statements were an attempt to leverage public sentiment thereby, expanding the war effort. It is important to note that MacArthur's efforts, however misguided, were not malign. Instead, his actions were motivated by "nothing less than a deep love for his country."<sup>60</sup> He truly believed that what he was doing was best for America given his understanding of the region and many years of experience.

The last point to consider is that perhaps the JCS were unable to impart upon MacArthur an understanding of the war's limited nature given his overall, reputation, seniority, and years of experience. There is no doubt that the JCS had routine communication with MacArthur, which includes Bradley and Collins visiting Tokyo on several occasions within the first six months of the war. Nonetheless and without exception, the members of the JCS were considerably junior to him. His closest peer was Bradley who graduated from West Point twelve years after MacArthur and had served as a major in World War I at the same time MacArthur was a brigadier general. As mentioned previously, MacArthur received his direction from the civilian leadership via the JCS. At times, communications from MacArthur to the "youngsters...directing operations" were often "assertive with a hint of lecture and condescension."<sup>61</sup> This was particularly evident in

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<sup>60</sup> Matthew B. Ridgway, *The Korean War* (New York, NY: Doubleday & Company, 1967), 156.

<sup>61</sup> Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, *The Joint Chiefs of Staff and National Policy 1950-1951*, 245, 263.

communications that concerned operational restrictions. Nonetheless, the JCS seldom ordered MacArthur in a decisive manner to avoid giving offense.<sup>62</sup>

One example of this occurred in a conversation between Ridgway and the Air Force Chief of Staff, General Hoyt Vandenberg on December 3, 1950. In short, the conversation centered on MacArthur's demonstrated violation of orders in using non-Korea troops in the provinces that bordered the Soviet Union and China.<sup>63</sup> Ridgway asked Vandenberg why the JCS did not send orders to MacArthur telling him what to do. In reply, Vandenberg said, "What good would that do? He wouldn't obey the order. What can we do?" To this, Ridgway replied, "You can relieve any commander who won't obey orders, can't you? Ridgway stated that at this point, Vandenberg's "lips parted and he looked at me with an expression both puzzled and amazed."<sup>64</sup>

The inability of the JCS to impart shared understanding, even after the patience had given way to aggravation, loss of trust, and tighter control, remained minimal at best. In fact, this very issue was a large contributing factor to Truman's October visit to Tokyo in October. Indeed, it reached a point where the JCS deliberately withheld information from MacArthur. The clearest indication of this occurred at the very beginning of April 1951, where the JCS grew alarmed at the possibility of large-scale Soviet intervention.<sup>65</sup> Accordingly, they drafted an order authorizing MacArthur, in the event of a major attack, to bomb air bases in Manchuria and China. While waiting for Marshall's approval, the JCS did not inform MacArthur despite the fact that knowledge of this decision would allow him to begin contingency planning. The concern, as

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<sup>62</sup> Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, *The Joint Chiefs of Staff and National Policy 1950-1951*, 245.

<sup>63</sup> Ridgway, *The Korean War*, 61.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 62.

<sup>65</sup> Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, *The Joint Chiefs of Staff and National Policy 1950-1951*, 245-246.

Bradley later wrote, was that MacArthur might “make a premature decision in carrying it [the order] out.”<sup>66</sup>

Despite this, the JCS remained reluctant to recommend MacArthur’s relief even after he had clearly undermined the administration and violated Presidential directives. Acheson later wrote that the Joint Chiefs were hesitant to order a withdrawal to the Pyongyang-Wonsan line upon learning of the Chinese intervention. He stated that such an order would have ran counter to the traditional powers of the theater commander and more importantly, “it would have meant a fight with MacArthur...and his relief under arguable circumstances.”<sup>67</sup> Whether the JCS wanted to protect MacArthur, felt inferior to him, or both, it appears evident that his personal power allowed him to stretch the rules and in some cases, ignore them. After all, Acheson warned the President that relieving MacArthur, an American hero, “would be the biggest of his administration.”<sup>68</sup>

From the perspective of a JCS member, Ridgway highlighted MacArthur’s physical and mental separation from Washington. In summary, the following captures the salient points developed above:

It is clear that the nation’s top civilian and military leaders, using a wider-angle lens, with deeper resources of information...on the Soviet Union, and with more comprehensive estimates of the possible consequences of general war in Europe, had a much clearer view of the realities and responsibilities of the day. In their view, the kind of ‘victory’ sought by the Theater Commander...would have incurred overbalancing liabilities elsewhere. MacArthur’s beliefs...were based on less information on the world situations and of course on still less information on domestic political factors completely outside his purview.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, *The Joint Chiefs of Staff and National Policy 1950-1951*, 246.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 146.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 247.

<sup>69</sup> Ridgway, *The Korean War*, 149.

In all, the effects of this flawed understanding did not become significant in terms of consequence until tactical success made possible the expansion of the political objective. Accordingly, the analysis now turns to the communication and confusion surrounding the policy decision to seek unification of Korea and the subsequent Chinese intervention. Here, the inability of discourse to mediate between Washington's larger view, the commander, and the events on the battlefield become evident.

#### Fighting the War: Communication and Confusion

Following the success of mid-September, the political aim shifted to the unification of Korea creating confusion and increasing the tension between MacArthur and Washington. After all, unification by political and diplomatic means had been the original goal in accordance with NSC 8/1.<sup>70</sup> Perhaps, Washington's desire to achieve a big win on the eve of Congressional elections provided further motivation for an expanded objective. In any case, the decision to unify the peninsula resulted in a mismatch between ends and means. Aside from the fact that the number of UN forces was insufficient to occupy and pacify all of Korea, the initial belief was that the war would be over quickly given a retreating enemy and a Chinese government concerned primarily with border defense. Therefore, the objective was expanded with no increase in resources, while maintaining the operational restrictions to avoid widening the war. Once it became apparent that the Chinese had entered the war on a large scale, Washington identified the mismatch and adjusted the aim accordingly. Once again, MacArthur was reluctant to settle for a limited victory. What follows is an examination of how this came to be.

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<sup>70</sup> US Secretary of State, "NSC 8/1: A Report to the National Security Council on the Position of the United States with Respect to Korea, Washington, DC, March 16, 1949, 1-2, accessed October 10, 2015, [http://www.trumanlibrary.org/whistlestop/study\\_collections/korea/large/documents/pdfs/kr-7-7.pdf](http://www.trumanlibrary.org/whistlestop/study_collections/korea/large/documents/pdfs/kr-7-7.pdf).

On September 27, MacArthur received the following instructions from the JCS as directed by the Secretary of Defense:

Your military objective is the destruction of North Korean Armed Forces. In attaining this objective you are authorized to conduct military operations...north of the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel in Korea, provided that at the time of such operations there has been no entry into North Korea by major Soviet or Chinese Communist Forces, no announcement of intended entry, nor a threat to counter our operations militarily in North Korea. Under no circumstances, however will your forces cross the Manchurian or USSR borders of Korea and, as a matter of policy, no non-Korean Ground Forces will be used in the northeast provinces bordering the Soviet Union or in the area along the Manchurian border. Furthermore, support of your operations north or south of the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel will not include Air or Naval action against Manchuria or against USSR territory.<sup>71</sup>

As clear as these instructions may seem, it was not the case. According to Acheson's testimony in the MacArthur hearings, the military mission was to pursue and round-up the North Korean forces that existed in vicinity of and south of the thirty-eighth parallel. Meanwhile, the ROK units were to operate in the most northern portions of Korea. Again, the consensus was that the war would be over quickly and that the enemy would surrender. Accordingly, the UN resolution of October 7, called for elections in the north, unifying the peninsula by political and diplomatic means under the observation of the UN. That is, the NSC nor the UN ever adopted unification as a military objective.<sup>72</sup> On the other hand, MacArthur understood that unification was to occur by the sword for he later testified, "My mission was to clear out all North Korea, to unify it and to liberalize it."<sup>73</sup> Indeed, his orders were to clear "communist aggressors from all of Korea."<sup>74</sup> When the enemy did not surrender, MacArthur set out to destroy the North Korean

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<sup>71</sup> US Joint Chiefs of Staff, "Personal for MacArthur: From JCS to Cdr UN Forces in Korea, JCS 92801," September 27, 1950, Harry S. Truman Papers, Korea Messages (Independence, MO: The Truman Library, 1950), Box 14.

<sup>72</sup> Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, *The Joint Chiefs of Staff and National Policy 1950-1951*, 209, 217.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 106.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 217.



forces in accordance with the instructions from the JCS and his own understanding of warfare and victory.

Shortly following these instructions, it became apparent that there was some confusion over the process of unification given the plans MacArthur forwarded to the JCS for approval. Although the JCS eventually approved his plan, they did so with concern. It was at this point that the statesman and commander met for the first time. Truman's purpose for the visit to Wake Island was to gain MacArthur's firsthand knowledge of the situation and more importantly, convey the foreign policy of his administration.<sup>75</sup> On October 15, several of the key decision-makers gathered at Wake Island, including Omar Bradley, Admiral Radford (Commander in Chief US Pacific Fleet), John Muccio (Ambassador to Korea), Franck Pace (Secretary of the Army), and Dean Rusk (Assistant Secretary of State).

Truman began the meeting by asking MacArthur to provide his estimate of the situation as well as his thoughts on the unification of Korea. In response, MacArthur stated the following:

I believe that formal resistance will end throughout North and South Korea by Thanksgiving... They are pursuing a forlorn hope... They are poorly trained, led and equipped, but they are obstinate... It is my hope to be able to withdraw the Eighth Army to Japan by Christmas. All occupations are failures (the President nodded in agreement). After elections are held I expect to pull out all occupying troops... Again, I emphasize the fact that the military should get out the minute the guns stop shooting and civilians take over.<sup>76</sup>

The next round of questions focused on the probability of Chinese or Soviet intervention.

MacArthur discounted this prospect, in agreement with both the JCS and Central Intelligence

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<sup>75</sup> Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, *The Joint Chiefs of Staff and National Policy 1950-1951*, 113.

<sup>76</sup> Douglas MacArthur, "Substance Of Statements Made At Wake Island Conference on 15 October 1950, Compiled from Notes Kept by the Conferees from Washington," Harry S. Truman Administration File, George M. Elsey Papers, (Independence, MO: The Truman Library, 1950), Box 72.

Agency, while indicating little military capability within the People's Liberation Army. In fact, MacArthur replied that any Chinese intervention would result in the "greatest slaughter."<sup>77</sup>

Although in hindsight there are many issues with MacArthur's assessments, Truman left the meeting believing it had served its purpose; all appeared to be in complete understanding. Truman returned to Washington assured by the theater commander and the JCS, that the war would end quickly and that the Chinese would not intervene, both of which were assumptions that underpinned the October 7 UN resolution mentioned above.<sup>78</sup> More importantly, at arguably the most critical point in the war, there was no discussion of US or UN policy or objectives nor was there a discussion over any of the previous disagreements concerning force limitations, operational restrictions or MacArthur's plans to advance towards the Yalu River. In fact, MacArthur later testified in May 1951, "There is no policy – there is nothing...no plan or anything."<sup>79</sup> Simply put, there was never meeting of the minds between the statesman and the commander; and thus the stage was set for protracted war given Chinese intervention.

Although, the JCS initially saw China's objectives as extremely limited and centered on the defense of its border and industrial complexes, they also recognized the potential for a much wider war. On November 8, the JCS began to reframe the problem in light of the Chinese intervention and informed MacArthur that they were re-examining his task to destroy the North

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<sup>77</sup> Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, *The Joint Chiefs of Staff and National Policy 1950-1951*, 114.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 115-116.

<sup>79</sup> Douglas MacArthur, statement for the "Conduct an Inquiry into the Military Situation in the Far East and the Facts Surrounding the Relief of General of The Army Douglas MacArthur," on May 3, 1951, to the Committee on Armed Services and the Committee on Foreign Relations United States Senate, 82<sup>nd</sup> Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> sess., pt. 1 (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 1951), 68, accessed March 15, 2016. [http://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=uc1.\\$b643205;view=1up;seq=7](http://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=uc1.$b643205;view=1up;seq=7).

Koreans forces.<sup>80</sup> Yet, MacArthur saw a larger war against communism as evidenced in his reply to the JCS:

I do not believe the hydroelectric system is the dominant consideration animating the Communist intervention in Korea...they [the Chinese] now make first-class soldiers...This has produced a new and dominate power in Asia which for its own purposes is allied with Soviet Russia, but which in its own concepts and methods has become aggressively imperialistic with a lust for expansion and increased power normal to this type of imperialism.<sup>81</sup>

Indeed, it was a “new war” and MacArthur’s response is indicative of his understanding. He continued to call for more troops and the ability to carry the war into Chinese territory. Returning to the previously mentioned message from MacArthur to the JCS on December 30, he requested authorization to blockade China’s coast, destroy their industrial war-making capacity, and enlist the support of Chang Kai-Shek’s Nationalist forces while demanding more US and UN troops.<sup>82</sup> In his view, unification was about ensuring that democracy rivaled over communism and now that China had entered the war, it was time to increase the expenditure of effort. However, the effort MacArthur required to achieve his version of victory, exceeded the value of the political object and therefore, his requests were continuously denied.

Nonetheless, MacArthur continued attempts to isolate the Korean peninsula, yet it could not be done. He failed to realize that from their “privileged sanctuary” the Chinese could sustain the conflict for indefinite period at much lower cost than the United States. Even if MacArthur was authorized to destroy the bridges over the Yalu River, the winter brought about freezing temperatures making the bridges irrelevant. The same applies to the Chinese bases along the

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<sup>80</sup> Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, *The Joint Chiefs of Staff and National Policy 1950-1951*, 131.

<sup>81</sup> Eliot A. Cohen, “Only Half the Battle: The Chinese Intervention in Korea, 1950,” *Studies in Intelligence* (Fall 1988): 59, accessed December 29, 2015, [http://www.foia.cia.gov/sites/default/files/document\\_conversions/44/1988-11-01.pdf](http://www.foia.cia.gov/sites/default/files/document_conversions/44/1988-11-01.pdf).

<sup>82</sup> Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, *The Joint Chiefs of Staff and National Policy 1950-1951*, 182.

border region for limited objective attacks would merely disrupt their ability to sustain the fight. Beyond this, there was also a failure to understand the enemy's tactics. By avoiding roads, maximizing camouflage, and moving at night, the Chinese were able to mitigate US air power. Meanwhile, UN forces were largely confined to the roads and spread out over vast distances making them vulnerable to concentrated attacks. As the assumption of a quick victory faded, the United States once again reassessed the situation and the ends to achieve.

### **Ridgway's War, December 1950 – May 1952**

#### **Ridgway's Background**

General Ridgway's reputation as an outstanding combat commander along with his many diplomatic assignments helps to explain his views on civil-military relations as well as his actions in Korea. In all, Ridgway's assignment history provided him with a broad view of the world. The son of an army colonel, Ridgway graduated from West Point in 1917. However, he did not fight in World War I and instead performed duties as an instructor. Later he commanded two Infantry companies, one of which was in China. By 1928, he hoped to be part of the Army's pentathlon team in the summer Olympics, but his fluency in Spanish landed him the opportunity to become a member of the United States mission to Nicaragua. Accordingly, he "could not reject so bright an opportunity to prepare for any military-diplomatic role that the future might offer."<sup>83</sup> This was the first of many diplomatic assignments to come and in 1930, he became the military advisor to Theodore Roosevelt Jr., Governor General of the Philippines. By 1937, Ridgway was serving in the war plans division in Washington before assuming command of the Eighty-Second

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<sup>83</sup> Arlington National Cemetery, "Matthew Bunker Ridgway, General, United States Army," March, 1993, accessed February 16, 2016, <http://www.arlingtoncemetery.net/ridgway.htm>.

Airborne Division in 1942. Following the end of World War II and his command of the Eighteenth Airborne Corps, Ridgway was reassigned to London in 1946, where he served as General Dwight Eisenhower's military advisor to the United Nations Assembly. Following yet another diplomatic assignment, this time to the Caribbean, he served as the Army Deputy Chief of Staff in the Pentagon where he remained until December of 1950 before assuming command of the Eighth Army in Korea.<sup>84</sup>

#### Ridgway's Understanding of the War

Only five months into the war, the polls indicated that domestic support for the war had plummeted, contributing to yet another shift in the political aim. With the success of the Chinese second offensive in December 1950, US casualties mounted and the cost of the war began to grow out of proportion to its strategic significance. Moreover, the polls indicated that sixty-six percent of Americans wanted US troops out of Korea, forty-nine percent said that the war was a mistake, and only twenty-five percent believed that America should stay and continue the fight.<sup>85</sup> This was a sharp decline from the eighty percent that supported the war only five months earlier. With waning domestic support, the political aim shifted back to the restoration of Korea status quo ante bellum. This required a negotiated settlement and therefore, the need to gain a position of military advantage.<sup>86</sup> Again, Truman's logic was that the preservation of South Korea, although a limited objective, would prove to the communists that they could not win a regional war, thereby deterring Soviet aggression in Europe and bolstering the credibility of forward

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<sup>84</sup> Arlington National Cemetery, "Matthew Bunker Ridgway."

<sup>85</sup> George H. Gallup, *The Gallup Poll: Public Opinion 1935-1971* (New York, NY: Random House, 1972), 2:961.

<sup>86</sup> Millett, *The War For Korea*, 377.

collective defense under the UN.<sup>87</sup> Yet, by December of 1950 the strategic problem in Korea was how long the Chinese could take the punishment in relation to the public's acceptance of US losses, "even if the ratio is twenty Chinese to one American."<sup>88</sup>

The JCS concurred with Truman and added that a failure to retain South Korea provided the communists with forward based aviation that served to threaten Japan and the Pacific-Rim defense. Consequently, the JCS reasoned that the military end-state required the restoration of the international boundary and with it the establishment of a demilitarized zone under the constant surveillance of UN forces. Furthermore, the war termination criteria required US presence until the South Korean armed forces were capable of defending themselves.<sup>89</sup> Acknowledging this, Ridgway determined that the preservation of South Korea required breaking the will of the Chinese. The focus now turns to how he arrived at this conclusion.

First, leading up to and during the first six months of the war, Ridgway was able to monitor the situation from the Pentagon gaining a clear understanding of the strategic context and the war's objectives. Aside from the daily interactions with the JCS, Ridgway took part in numerous meetings with the NSC and President. This routine contact with the nation's top leaders greatly contributed to his understanding. Indeed, he later commented that there appeared to be little confusion for, "at no point did the military operate without specific political, military, and geographical objectives" other than the brief periods following the success at Inchon and the failure at the Yalu.<sup>90</sup> Moreover, he stated, "at no point did our authorities feel free to escalate the conflict without restraint" given domestic political considerations and the overarching concern of

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<sup>87</sup> Millett, *The War For Korea*, 365.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 398.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 365.

<sup>90</sup> Ridgway, *The Korean War*, 231.

global war.<sup>91</sup> In large part, the lack of confusion from Ridgway's perspective was the result of his proximity to the JCS and President.

Second, and because of the discourse that took place during these interactions, Ridgway adopted a definition of victory different from that of World War II. In this case, victory was the restoration of South Korea, which required the ability to negotiate the terms of peace from a position of advantage. Returning to FSR 100-15, *Larger Units*, the "strategic defensive" requires the denial of what is desired by the opponent and the preservation of the status quo. Furthermore, "the national objective may be secured by the repulse of the invader, by the exhaustion of his resources, and the breaking of his will to continue the offensive."<sup>92</sup> Understanding this, Ridgway reasoned that the war in Korea was not an absolute effort to defeat communism, nor was it a preventative war to destroy China's war making potential any more than it was about choosing between final victory, stalemate, or withdrawal.<sup>93</sup> Ridgway realized that "military victory was not what it had been in the past...if the means we used to achieve it brought wholesale devastation to the world" given direct conflict with Russia.<sup>94</sup>

Although the two commanders had fundamentally different understandings, Ridgway, like MacArthur, created his conceptual approach to the Korean War by combining his definition of victory with his experience in World War II. In the European theater, the Italy campaign proved extremely difficult, as the Allies were unable to isolate the third side of the peninsula despite having air superiority.<sup>95</sup> Consequently, the Germans were able to maintain roughly

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<sup>91</sup> Ridgway, *The Korean War*, 231.

<sup>92</sup> FSR 100-15, *Larger Units*, 14.

<sup>93</sup> Ridgway, *The Korean War*, 144-145.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, 231.

<sup>95</sup> Russell F. Weigley, *The American Way of War: A History of the United States Military*

twenty-six divisions in Italy for two years by using a handful of mountain passes.<sup>96</sup> This combined with the effects of rough terrain allowed the Germans to sustain the fight for an indefinite period. These facts along with the limited means provided did not go unnoticed as Ridgway developed his approach to the Korean War. The aim was not to overwhelm and defeat the enemy but to exhaust him and set the conditions for an acceptable peace.

Where MacArthur was bold, Ridgway was deliberate and calculated. Korea was a war of limited means and as such, he could only expect to receive replacements for combat losses. This led to an attritional, defensive-offensive strategy designed to preserve his forces while inflicting maximum casualties on the enemy. In fact, his stated purpose was to kill as many Chinese as possible, breaking their will to continue the fight.<sup>97</sup> Therefore, to accomplish this he gained and maintained contact with the enemy where he was able to exploit culmination and rapidly transition from defense to offense.

Third, Ridgway's conception of victory and the way to achieve it was accompanied by a progressive view of civil-military relations well suited to the complexities of limited war. In all, Ridgway's did not recognize a clear line of demarcation between civilian and military. Moreover, his history of diplomatic assignments no doubt shaped his views of civil-military relations. At least three decades prior to Cohen and Herspring, Ridgway argued many of the same points. In his 1967 book entitled, *The Korean War*, Ridgway not only understood the military's subordination to policy but also argued for unequal dialogue as he wrote:

In the past, the military man has too often aimed only at the complete destruction of the enemy in the field. He should not be the one to set the political objectives our military seeks to attain. But, in the complex warfare of today he must be more than ever free to

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*Strategy and Policy* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1973), 389.

<sup>96</sup> Ridgway, *The Korean War*, 244.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 108.



speaking up frankly and boldly in the highest councils of our country concerning the policies our civilian leaders are considering. Once a policy is set, however, it is the military man, in keeping with the oath he takes...who should either execute that policy or resign from service.<sup>98</sup>

Ridgway went on to argue the importance of discourse in maintaining mutual understanding in an era of limited war:

“It became clear that policy could no longer be formulated by the White House alone, or by the Department of State, or by the Defense Department; that neither civilian statesmen nor military professionals, working in separate compartments, could by themselves lay down the lines that could give direction to our intercourse with other sovereignties. It is clear now, or should be clear, that best results flow from intimate day-to-day collaboration among military and civilian leaders, wherein the civilian leaders propose the ends...and the military leaders supply their estimate...Such collaboration is possible only when civil and military authorities seek and earnestly consider each other’s point of view.”<sup>99</sup>

The concept of unequal dialogue served Ridgway well. His proximity to the JCS and President led to a fundamentally different understanding of the war at hand. This understanding manifested itself in an attritional approach clearly demonstrated by his actions as both the Commander of Eighth Army and United Nations Command.

#### Fighting the War: Communication and Coherence

##### Command of the Eighth Army

Just as tactical success and failure shifted the US/UN objectives, Mao Zedong now sought to reunify the peninsula given the great success of the Chinese second offensive. The Chinese field commander, Peng Dehuai, decided to concentrate his attacks on the ROK units, as he believed that their collapse would force a US withdrawal from the war.<sup>100</sup> Meanwhile, Peng’s

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<sup>98</sup> Ridgway, *The Korean War*, 232.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, vii.

<sup>100</sup> Millett, *The War for Korea*, 381.

tactical success in early January facilitated Stalin's "peace offensive" at the UN. In short, Stalin planned to use diplomacy to enable Kim Il-Sung's unification of Korea by driving the US from Asia, isolating Japan, and gaining international recognition of the PRC as the legitimate Chinese government.<sup>101</sup>

However, Ridgway had different plans and from December 1950 to April 1951, he proceeded to chip away at the enemy's will to fight setting the conditions for armistice negotiations. He recognized that time was on the defender's side and that the preservation of his forces amounted to sheer resistance that served only to frustrate and exhaust the enemy in a campaign of attrition.<sup>102</sup> Therefore, he whittled away at Mao's cost-tolerance by avoiding culmination, dictating the tempo, and applying constant pressure. His focus on reconnaissance increased his situational understanding, allowing him to anticipate and adeptly manage transitions. Initially, he assumed the defense and was able to repel the Chinese third and fourth offenses while the battles at Chip'yong-Ni and Wonju provided a solution to the Chinese tactics that had previously proven near impossible to stop. The answer resided in the depth of the defense, mutually supporting positions, and the concentration of firepower.<sup>103</sup> In this way, the Eighth Army would continue its resistance and prove that it could not be driven from the peninsula.

With the Chinese fourth offensive culminating in mid-February, Ridgway launched a three-phased counteroffensive that corresponded with Operations Killer, Ripper and Courageous, and Rugged and Dauntless. As the enemy began to consolidate and withdraw, Ridgway began

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<sup>101</sup> Millett, *The War for Korea*, 380-381.

<sup>102</sup> Clausewitz, *On War*, 98.

<sup>103</sup> Millett, *The War for Korea*, 403.

Operation Killer on February 21 where the Eighth Army cautiously maneuvered north for eight weeks against the Chinese rear guard.<sup>104</sup> Upon reaching phase line Arizona on March 7, Ridgway immediately began phase two with Operations Ripper and Courageous. The purpose of the operation was to find the Chinese main body denying Peng freedom from contact.<sup>105</sup> As the Eighth Army continued to move north to phase line Idaho, its objective remained the attrition of communist forces. Meanwhile, Ridgway achieved the secondary objectives of reopening the Inchon harbor, and recapturing Seoul. The capture of Seoul served to weaken Stalin's "peace offensive" at the UN while the port at Inchon extended Eighth Army's operational reach.<sup>106</sup> However, in understanding the capabilities and limitations of his own forces, Ridgway continued to insist on incremental and deliberate advances in accordance with the established phase lines. The aim of which was to avoid the issues of overextension and culmination that plagued MacArthur in his dash to the Yalu River.<sup>107</sup>

The last phase of the counteroffensive began on 1 April and ultimately set the conditions for armistice negotiations. In anticipation of another Chinese offensive, Ridgway's intermediate objective became the control of defensible terrain in vicinity of the "Iron Triangle."<sup>108</sup> By April 22, Operations Rugged and Dauntless advanced the Eighth Army some thirty miles north of the thirty-eighth parallel, reaching phase line Kansas. Now in control of the central corridor, NSC 48/5 outlined four military objectives that consisted of bringing about an armistice, establishing ROK authority in South Korea, removing all foreign forces from the peninsula, and permitting the

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<sup>104</sup> Millett, *The War for Korea*, 412-413.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, 410-411.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, 413-415.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, 290, 305.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, 413.

buildup of ROK military strength sufficient to enable the nation to defend itself.<sup>109</sup> In five months' time, Ridgway set the initial conditions for a negotiated peace. His approach to the problem at hand centered on the preservation of his forces and the destruction of the enemy. The JCS came to adopt Ridgway's approach for the remainder of the war.

#### Command of United Nations Command

Although Ridgway's success forced the Chinese to abandon the pursuit of unification by June, it took another nine-thousand US lives and two years' time to convert tactical victory into political success. While the leaders of both North and South Korea remained motivated by the quest for unification, China and the United States began to question the amount of effort to expend. Accordingly, neither side possessed a great advantage making the negotiations near impossible to accomplish. China began to see the war as a drain that diverted its attention from Formosa. Meanwhile, the Soviets sought to keep China in the war as it tied down US forces in Asia mitigating any military response in Europe. It also drained economic resources and caused political difficulties for Truman.<sup>110</sup> At the same time however, the Chinese were unwilling to bend to every US desire given a draw on the field of battle.<sup>111</sup> In all, the war remained at a stalemate with either side unwilling to invest the effort required to turn the tide. With the objectives clear, the means fixed, and the enemy obstinate, Ridgway moved forward with a steadfast commitment to the administration.

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<sup>109</sup> Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, *The Joint Chiefs of Staff and National Policy 1950-1951*, 225.

<sup>110</sup> Gideon Rose, *How Wars End: Why We Always Fight the Last Battle* (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster Paperbacks, 2010), 134.

<sup>111</sup> Rose, *How Wars End*, 157.

After gaining clarification from the JCS on his directives, Ridgway in turn provided his guidance to the new Eighth Army commander, General James Van Fleet. The guidance he provided to his successor in April is indicative of his continued support to the administration. In attempt to avoid World War III, Eighth Army was restricted in its movement north. The mission was to repel aggression and inflict maximum casualties, for “the continued piecemeal destruction of the enemy’s offensive potential” would materially support the political objectives while “concurrently destroying Communist China’s military prestige.”<sup>112</sup> Therefore, Van Fleet was instructed, to maintain an offensive spirit and to retain the initiative without undue sacrifice of men or equipment. Although, the restrictions on the use of force might be “viewed as unreasonable” by subordinates, Ridgway himself accepted full responsibility for these restrictions. However, in doing so he expected the “full and willing cooperation of all concerned.”<sup>113</sup> The instructions delivered to Van Fleet clearly demonstrate a larger understanding of the war but more importantly, it demonstrates Ridgway’s personal ownership of the President’s objectives.

Despite Ridgway’s support to and alignment with the administration’s policies, disagreements did occur. Although, Ridgway had little decision-making authority in the negotiations themselves, he remained actively engaged in the discourse surrounding them. In doing so, the JCS earnestly studied Ridgway’s recommendations including them in much of the discourse with the NSC and President.<sup>114</sup> In particular, a disagreement occurred over the

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<sup>112</sup> Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, *The Joint Chiefs of Staff and National Policy 1950-1951*, 219-220.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, 219.

<sup>114</sup> Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, *The Joint Chiefs of Staff and National Policy 1951-1953: The Korean War Part II*, vol. III, *History of the Joint Chiefs of Staff*, by James F. Schnabel and Robert J. Watson (Washington, DC: Office of Joint History, 1998), 15-16.

administration's stance on prisoner repatriation. First, Ridgway saw the insistence on voluntary repatriation as a block to establishing the armistice that resulted in the continued expenditure of life and endangerment of UN prisoners.<sup>115</sup> Second, voluntary repatriation would establish a precedent contrary to the Geneva Conventions that could potentially jeopardize the return of US prisoners in future wars. Third, the policy could force the Chinese to break off the negotiations all together. Last, the daily requirements associated with guarding and feeding 140,000 enemy prisoners were exorbitant.<sup>116</sup>

Conversely, Truman saw forced repatriation as a morally bankrupt policy given the previous experience of World War II. A public statement issued in May of 1952 demonstrates this: forced repatriation "would result in misery and bloodshed to the eternal dishonor of the United States and United Nations. We will not buy an armistice by turning over human beings for slaughter or slavery."<sup>117</sup>In agreement, the JCS further argued that caving in on the issue to simply end the war would likely signal weakness to the communists.<sup>118</sup> Of all the issues surrounding the negotiations, whether the establishment of a demarcation line, arrangements for the cease-fire or the political issues concerning the governments of North and South Korea, the issue of repatriation would prove the most difficult to resolve as it provided both the Chinese and United States a substitute for clear-cut victory.

Regardless of this fundamental disagreement, the research has found no evidence to suggest that Ridgway was anything other than supportive of the administration's decisions. In all,

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<sup>115</sup> Rose, *How Wars End*, 140.

<sup>116</sup> Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, *The Joint Chiefs of Staff and National Policy 1951-1953*, 60-61, 89.

<sup>117</sup> Harry S. Truman, "Statement by the President on General Ridgway's Korean Armistice Proposal, May 7, 1952," *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: Harry S. Truman, 1952-1953* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1966), 321.

<sup>118</sup> Rose, *How Wars End*, 128-129.

communication was constant and regardless of the topic debated, Ridgway assumed personal responsibility for the administration's decisions. In the case of voluntary repatriation, he accepted both the JCS and Truman's stance on the issue where he set his sights on obtaining the release of UN prisoners as quickly as possible. This required a precarious balance between keeping the enemy at the negotiating table and breaking his will to continue.

However, as the war carried into 1952 with no resolution in sight, Ridgway resisted any attempt to compel a quick end to the war. Anticipating the discussion of a major offensive in Washington, he ordered his staff to conduct a thorough study of the situation in March. He stated that large-scale destruction of the enemy was a high-risk venture not supported by the means available. Moreover, it would result in many casualties and was likely to precipitate direct Soviet involvement. He based his recommendations on the estimates provided by his staff, which indicated that the enemy had significantly increased his forces and capabilities during the stalemate. Both Washington and Ridgway's successor, General Mark W. Clark, accepted his judgement despite the fact that Clark, like MacArthur, believed in an expanded war effort to reduce China's war-making potential.<sup>119</sup> In all, Ridgway's assessment provided the rationale for limiting military activity throughout the remainder of the war.<sup>120</sup> His judgement was informed by a wider view that accounted for the situation in its entirety to include domestic political factors. Moreover, he provided his 'best advice' despite the fact he personally wanted nothing more than to end the stalemate.

German historian Hans Delbruck becomes relevant to the analysis at this point. Influenced by Clausewitz, he sought to expand upon the theory of limited war. He asserted that

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<sup>119</sup> David Rees, *Korea: The Limited War* (New York: Saint Martins Press, 1964), 207.

<sup>120</sup> Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, *The Joint Chiefs of Staff and National Policy 1951-1953*, 144-145.

no uniform strategic doctrine exists and as a result, military strategy consists of wars of annihilation and wars of exhaustion. In either case, the military strategy must remain in accord with the political objective.<sup>121</sup> This dictum holds true even as the political aim shifts in accordance with tactical success and failure on the battlefield. The German High Command during World War I offers one example as the Schlieffen Plan failed to materialize and instead, produced a war on two fronts. Consequently, the political realities and situation on the ground no longer supported a war of annihilation to annex territory and dominate central Europe.<sup>122</sup>

In some ways, the Korean War offers a parallel as the Chinese intervention changed the situation on the ground. However, unlike the German High Command, the United States and UN understood the new political reality while Ridgway recognized that the means provided did not support a war of annihilation and annexation, but rather a war of exhaustion to restore the status quo. Returning to FSR 100-15 and FM 100-5, “the higher commander should be fully conversant with the political objectives so that his strategic plans of action may attain” those objectives.<sup>123</sup> Moreover, the commander must ensure the proper expenditure of combat strength in proportion to the objective to be attained.<sup>124</sup>

## Conclusion

The analysis considered how each commander’s understanding was shaped from experience, events on the ground, and discourse with civilian leaders. Prior experience illuminates the commander’s preconceived notions and tendencies while the events on the ground

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<sup>121</sup> Hodge, *Philosophers of War*, 24.

<sup>122</sup> Gordon Craig, “Delbruck: The Military Historian,” in *Makers of Modern Strategy*, ed. Perter Paret (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986), 341-343.

<sup>123</sup> FSR 100-15, *Larger Units*, 13-14.

<sup>124</sup> FM 100-5, *Operations*, 28.



served as both a manifestation of the commander's understanding and his demonstrated ability, or lack thereof, to adapt to something new and unexpected. On the other hand, the civil-military discourse aimed to mediate between the two in effort to create shared understanding.

Again, the aim was to determine how two of America's greatest Generals arrived at a different understanding of the Korean War. If the most far-reaching act of judgement is the one jointly conducted by the statesman and commander, then it would imply that military leadership, defined as the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Theater Commanders, and Combatant Commanders, engages in routine discourse with the President, Secretary of Defense, and Congress. However, it was not until the 1986 Goldwater-Nichols Department of Defense Reorganization Act that the Combatant Commanders answered directly to the Secretary of Defense. In the case of the Korean War, given the structure associated with the 1947 National Security Act, the theater commander answered to the JCS who in turn answered to the Secretary of Defense.

Although the interface between the theater commander and JCS was no doubt critical, the single most important relationship existed between the JCS and Secretary of Defense with the latter providing the interface between civilian and military.<sup>125</sup> In her book, *The Wrong War*, Rosemary Foot concludes that commanders in the field are typically more 'hawkish' than the military officials that work in Washington. She points to MacArthur who favored an expanded war effort while stating that even Ridgway, although circumspect in his requests, favored "more steel and less silk."<sup>126</sup> Meanwhile, the JCS were less willing to expand the war as they balanced the overall defense priorities of the United States. Consequently, it is plausible to correlate the

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<sup>125</sup> Douglas Johnson and Setven Metz, *American Civil-Military Relations: New Issues, Enduring Problems* (Strategic Studies Institute, 1995), 18.

<sup>126</sup> Rosemary Foot, *The Wrong War*, ed. Rober J. Art and Robert Jervis (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985), 240.

theater commander's overall understanding of the war with his proximity to the civilian leadership in Washington.

Ridgway did desire an increase in bombing activity, but the guiding logic gained during his service at the Pentagon remained. His daily interactions with the JCS and civilian leaders during 1950 allowed him to witness and engage in matters of national security on a much greater frequency and at a higher level than MacArthur. This inherently facilitated a better understanding of the war's limited nature. A wider view revealed the purpose of intervention, and the logic behind Truman's thinking that made evident the restrictions placed on military force. This understanding manifested itself in an attritional, defensive-offensive strategy that served to erode the enemy's will and set the conditions for a negotiated peace. Ultimately, his proximity to the JCS and President allowed him to recognize that victory in Korea would not resemble what it had during World War II. Because of his immense success in Korea and history of diplomatic assignments, Ridgway was selected to replace General Eisenhower as the Supreme Allied Commander Europe in May 1952.

On the other hand, MacArthur's fourteen years of physical separation from Washington greatly inhibited a larger view of the war and the logic behind its aims. Even after Truman's visit to Wake Island, MacArthur concluded that there was no policy and no plan. Therefore, he set out to do what he thought was best for the national interest given his understanding of the war and victory. Similar to World War II, he sought final victory in what he believed to be a war against communism and its war-making capacity. His approach centered on imposing the terms of peace by isolating and overwhelming the enemy. This remained the case even after the Chinese intervened. MacArthur's offensive strategy of annihilation was fundamentally incompatible with the political aims and the means provided. In this case, his physical separation from Washington failed to create a shared understanding that ultimately resulted in his relief from command.

In closing, this research ultimately revealed the interdependence that exists between civil-military relations and operational art. Proximity to Washington resulted in two fundamentally different understandings of the Korea War. The need to create shared understanding through discourse is paramount as civilian and military leaders decide how to spend the Nation's blood and treasure. In all, Korea cost 139,000 US and 50,000 South Koreans casualties while the enemy suffered nearly 1.5 million casualties.<sup>127</sup> The issue of Chinese intervention, stalemate, and prisoner repatriation all served to prolong the war and create political difficulties for the Truman administration. However, the United Nations was able to deliver an effective blow to communist aggression while simultaneously bolstering the idea of collective security. In this way, the United States maintained its position of power bestowed by the two World Wars. For these reasons, as Clausewitz counsels, the first supreme most far-reaching act of judgement that the statesman and commander have to make is to establish the kind of war in which they are embarking.

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<sup>127</sup> Antuilio J. Echevarria II, "American Operational Art, 1917-2008," in *The Evolution of Operational Art: From Napoleon to the Present*, ed. John Andreas Olsen and Martin Van Crevald (Oxford, NY: Oxford University Press, 2011), 151.

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